

Sustain Mid Maine Coalition

Public Policy Team

Meeting Minutes

March 23, 2015

final – 4-27-2015

The meeting started at about 6:35 at the Winslow Public Library.

Members present: Jane Edwards, Elery Keene, Tom Tietenberg, Rob Ellis, and Peter Garrett. Dick Thomas arrived at about 6:10 p.m.

Jane chaired the meeting. Minutes were taken by Elery.

Minutes: Tom made a motion to amend the draft minutes by removing a sentence in the paragraph about “Brief activity reports by members” that said “Susan Collins will be involved”. This was seconded by Peter. All present voted in favor. Peter made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. This was seconded by Tom. All present voted in favor.

Brief activity reports and information sharing among members: Peter reported that he had attended a CCL regional meeting in Pennsylvania.

Peter asked members to write to friends, relatives, and legislators describing the CCL proposal for reducing emissions of carbon dioxide into the air by having the federal government place fee on fossil fuel carbon. The fee collected would be distributed to the general public so that the fee is revenue neutral. He pointed out that legislation to do this has been written by George Schultz, a Republican.

Peter has not found any legislation being considered by the State Legislative Committee on Transportation relating to climate change so has not given any testimony.

Peter mentioned that the legislature has a proposal for “Complete Streets Policy” which would make streets friendlier for pedestrian and bicycle travel. The SMMC Transportation Team wants the City of Waterville to adopt a Complete Streets Policy. He mentioned that College Avenue in Waterville would benefit by the city doing this.

Tom is following legislative proposals being considered by the Energy, Utilities, and Technology committee. He mentioned a “Demand Response System” which would try to reduce peak demand so that less energy would be needed at such times when electricity is more expensive to produce.

Tom said that there is also a proposal to bring hydroelectricity generated in Canada into Maine. This might lower the demand for generation of solar electricity in Maine. However there would be a cost to build the transmission lines from Canada into Maine.

Dick Thomas talked about a “Maine Student Climate Change group” that will be meeting in Augusta on April 11. This will involve people marching to the State House and there will be speakers. He said that it

would be good for some adults to join with the young people for this occasion. It starts at 11:00 a.m. and will last for about 3 hours.

Rob Ellis said that there is a State PUC Report that says solar energy is a good thing to do.

Tom said that this report is being considered by the legislative committee on environment.

Rob said that several solar LDs will be coming up fairly soon. One would allow more than 9 shareholders for solar panels mounted at a single location and distributed to different customers some distance away from the sources by wires owned by a public utility such as the Central Maine Power Company. This would result in an economy of scale that would save money for the users.

Rob said that another proposal would allow net metering related to solar generated electricity which would save money for the users.

Rob also said that the legislature will be looking into the idea of a solar district to generate solar electricity.

Jane said she attended a meeting of the Energy, Utilities, and Technology Committee relating to funding for a staff person in the Public Advocate's office to help people (the general public) understand procedures and actions of the PUC that are often difficult to understand. She supports this idea.

Jane said that there is a report by a recently formed Legislative Interim Committee about problems resulting from the increasing amount of acid in the ocean that is a result of climate change. Jane attended a Marine Resources committee meeting about it and supported a request for part time staffing to continue the work of this special committee.

Jane mentioned that she is very interested in work sessions by the Environment and Natural Resources Committee relating to mining regulations. The Committee is considering the same proposed regulations developed by the DEP and rejected by the legislature in its previous session. A new proposal, LD 750, sponsored by Representative Chapman would enact a new public law with much stronger environmental statutes concerning mining in Maine. If LD750 is enacted the DEP will be required to come up with an entirely new draft of environmentally stronger regulations and submit the new draft to the legislature for approval during the 2017 session of the legislature.

Jane initiated discussion of legislation that would increase the amount of ethanol that would be used in Maine auto fuel. This ethanol is produced from corn grown by farmers in the Midwest.

Elery said that he understood that in Maine this kind of fuel is not as efficient as auto fuel made entirely from petroleum. He also said that he thinks that it makes more sense to use corn grown in the United States for food to be eaten by people around the world than to use it for a fuel.

Peter said that there is good potential for producing electric cars that can be sold at a low enough price to compete with cars that use fossil fuel or auto fuel made from corn. If the CCL

proposal goes into effect people may be able to buy electric cars with some of their share of the “fossil fuel fee” that is paid by those who use petroleum fuel. But apparently that fee would be paid on only a portion of the petroleum fuel that was produced by petroleum, not on the part produced from corn based ethanol.

Peter also mentioned that our manufacturers are developing better batteries to store electricity to be used by electric cars.

Elery said that at the last SMMC Transportation Team meeting there was discussion of the possibility that passenger rail service could come to Waterville fairly soon. Guest speakers from Maine Rail Group, including Jack Sutton will speak to the Waterville City Council on April 7 at 7:00 p.m. One possibility would be to extend passenger service from Brunswick to Augusta and then to Waterville. The rail lines exist, but would have to be improved to achieve the 60 mile an hour speed needed for passenger service. Current speeds for freight service on PAN AM RAILROAD tracks are about 15 miles an hour.

Another possible route being considered for passenger rail in Maine is from Portland to the Auburn-Lewiston metropolitan area. This might come before the extension to Augusta because Auburn-Lewiston is a U.S. Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA) and Augusta is not. If this happens it would be possible to then extend passenger rail service from Lewiston to Waterville on the existing rail line that goes through Winthrop and Oakland instead of through Augusta. Of course Maine would want passenger service to go to Bangor. Either route to Bangor would go through Waterville. A member of the Waterville City Council was present at the SMMC Transportation Team meeting. He was very enthusiastic at the possibility of passenger train service to Waterville.

Elery said that the Winslow Town Council has recently learned that the Summit natural gas company has decided not to install a pipeline into Winslow from Waterville before July this year as was planned. This will be a very significant delay because in July the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) will begin doing repairs to route 201 from the Vassalboro town line to the Winslow end of the bridge between Winslow and the Waterville downtown area. Once this repaving is done, the DOT will not allow the pavement to be dug up for a pipeline for about 5 years. This is a big disappointment to the Winslow Town Council. Their plan was to use natural gas to heat the town office and the schools, all located close to Benton Avenue.

Elery asked Rob if there might be an effective way to heat Winslow schools using solar energy.

Rob said that it would probably cost less to convert the existing hot water system using fuel oil burners to natural gas than to a solar system. Hot water made from solar panels is usually not nearly as warm as the 170 degrees or so normally generated by a fuel oil or natural gas furnace. The heating distribution system would probably also need to be changed. It may cost very little

to change the existing fuel oil furnaces to burn natural gas. It would probably be necessary to change to heat pumps to effectively use solar energy to heat the schools. However, it might be possible to get a TIFF grant to help pay for this extra cost.

Another possible way to heat these school buildings using solar energy might be the method used by the Duratherm Windows Company in Vassalboro. That method would be to reface a south facing wall to efficiently collect solar heat and bring it into the building

The next meeting of the SMMC Public Policy team will be at REM building which is at 193 Main Street, in Waterville. It would be at the REM Board room on the second floor at 6:00 p.m. on April 27, the fourth Monday in April. We won't be able to use the Winslow Library because starting in April the library will close at 7:00 p.m. instead of 8:00 p.m.

Elery Keene